

Women Speak FOR THEMSELVES

Talking Points: HHS Mandate and Religious Freedom

1. What the fight is about:

Our objection to the “preventive health care” mandate is *not* about making contraception illegal. Birth control is legally protected by the Constitution itself.

It is *not* about whether the government will continue to fund it; both federal and state governments will continue to spend hundreds of millions of dollars annually to provide free or low-cost contraception to American women annually.

It is only about whether the government can *force* religious institutions and individuals to provide contraception, sterilization and abortifacient drugs to our employees via health insurance.

2. The mandate burdens our religious freedom:

Forcing educational, health care or other religious institutions to provide their employees something which directly conflicts with their religious teachings is a straightforward burden on the free exercise of religion. When religious people gather together to provide care for our “neighbor” as commanded by Jesus’ teachings in the Good Samaritan parable, they are no less “exercising” their religion than when they pray or worship God with their fellow believers. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*:

Love of neighbour... is ...a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level..... As a community, the Church must practise love. Love ... needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community.

He added:

The Church's deepest nature is expressed in exercising the ministry of charity

3. The mandate burdens our religious freedom even if the government claims that insurance companies or third parties will “pay for” the services which violate religious conscience

The federal government is proposing to amend the current mandate (after the Fall 2012 election) so that religious institutions will not be “cooperating” in the provision of objectionable services. Insurance companies or third parties would arrange to provide and pay for contraception. There are two problems with this proposed amendment.

First, insurance companies will simply fold the costs of contraception into the price of insurance charged to religious institutions.

Second, no matter how the accounting looks on paper, the fact remains that this proposal allows the government to reach into the internal affairs of religious

institutions and restructure the terms of employment. More, to change it from a workplace and a ministry that embodies and defers to religious witness...to one which is indistinguishable from any other private or public institution.

4. But Didn't President Obama "Accommodate" Religious Employers?

He promised he would but he didn't. Instead, he extended the deadline (to August 2013) for religious institutions to figure out how to violate their consciences, or face legal penalties. The originally proposed rule – requiring religious hospitals, schools, social services, etc. to cover contraception, sterilization and some drugs that can act as abortifacients – is presently in force.

5. Should it matter that many Catholics disagree with the Church's teachings on contraception?

Several responses are possible.

First, remember that the rule also mandates coverage of drugs that can act as early abortifacients.

Second, the government is constitutionally forbidden from reaching into religious institutions and telling them to comply with the preferences of members who disagree with the institution's religious doctrines.

Third, many Catholics and non-Catholics who don't understand or who haven't accepted Catholic teachings on contraception are upset at the government's attempting to dictate the behavior of religious institutions, and grateful at the Catholic Church's critical stance toward the medical and social effects of contraception.